15 POETS

JOHN KEATS

DR. M. A. FAROOQI

THE BOOK CORPORATION

FIFTEEN POETS

John Keats

Dr. M. A. Farooqi

THE BOOK CORPORATION
ARAMBAGH ROAD ... KARACHI ... PHONE 30743

First Edition ... ... April 1960

Price Rs. 1-8-0

Printed by: Nizamuddin Qureshi, at Central Printing Press.
Published by: The Book Corporation.

PREFACE

TO

"Fifteen Poets"

This work is an expression of my thirty-five years' enthusiastic love for each of the great English poets, and my twenty-five years' experience of imparting this love to my students. The aim here is to establish a personal contact with the individuality of each poet through those of his best works that have particular appeal for us orientals.

The aim of enabling the students to form their own estimate of a poet and to express this estimate in examinations or personal conversations is secondary. To move the students to go to the individual poet, to know him better, to enter into the spirit of his poetry, to enjoy him more heartily, and to express views about him more sympathetically and accurately—this is the mission behind this work.

MOHAMMED AHSAN FAROOQI.

CONTENTS

John Keats

I

(*Romantic Personality*)

Keats's Romanticism grew out of the English soil. Romanticism coming into England as a foreign influence had from the very beginning a tendency to make the poets look to themselves and their native land. It was an awakening that made them cast keen looks on their surroundings and to bring out imaginative elements from them according to the cravings of their own individual temperaments. The French Revolution was only a divine disturbance of their souls, but the resettlements were entirely native, inherent in the temperament of their race, part and parcel of their tradition, looking back to English Middle Ages, to the glorious Age of Elizabeth and its glorious Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton. On one side Romanticism is a revolt, but on the other it is a revival, a submission to all that was best in the tradition that has been supressed under the pressure of classicism. In Keats the element of revolt is completely absent and his Romanticism consists in the simple following of what his age had taken for granted as the best in the Ancients, the Middle Ages, the Elizabethans, and the poets of the immediate past.

By the time Keats came into the field the enthusiasm for revolt had spent itself and the age was definitely moving towards that balance which would be the hall-

mark of the coming age. He had no need to be a prophet, a metaphysician, a destroyer of social evils, a visionary of a reformed world. He had to be a poet, pure and simple, pursuing with intense application the line of true poetry without distracting his mind with philosophy, civil, moral, and political. His childhood was passed among people who had nothing to do with anything intellectual or aesthetic. Son of the master of a livery stable, the first of the four children, he was born on October 31, 1795. His mother was of higher society being the daugther of the master of his father. As a boy he distinguished himself by quarrelling with his playmates and giving promise, if of anything, of distinguishing himself in later life as an athlete. The only inclination towards cultural life in that household is shown by the desire of his parents to send John to Harrow. But their means did not allow them to realise this ambition. He could, however, be sent at eight years of age to the Ensfield school and there the friendship of the son of the head master, Charles Cowden Clarke became for him one of the most important influences of his life. But the loss of his parents obliged him to leave school and become a surgeon's apprentice. Later when he fell in love with Fanny Browne and wrote letters to her, he showed, as Matthew Arnold points out, the sensual, low-bred sentiments of a surgeon's apprentice.

But the spirit of Romantic poetry one day dawned on this surgeon's apprentice in quite a mysterious way at the age of twenty. As he watched the particles of dust dancing in a sunbeam coming into his room through a ventilator, his imagination was fired, and the apprentice to

surgery became an apprentice to the heavenly Muse of poetry. He became a dedicated spirit. Cowden Clarke came to his help and introduced him to Spenser whose true successor in the Romantic period he was to be. Spenser encouraged his desire for writing poetry and he sat down to imitate Spenser. Now on he began to live entirely in the company of poets, dead or alive mostly dead, of the Elizabethan Age. Cowden Clarke again introduced him to Chapman's translation of Homer, and his Hellenic bent of mind became so active that he wrote out the famous sonnet on *Chapman's Homer*. Greek mythology fascinated him and to know more about it he began to read Lamprere's *Classical Dictionary*. Chapman led him to other Elizabethans of whom the boisterous and fantastic Michael Drayton caught his attention most.

He did not keep away from his contemporaries. It was through Cowden Clarke, too, that he made the acquaintance of Leigh Hunt who with his usual generous-hearted encouragement, recognised Keats's first efforts and published them in his paper. Leigh Hunt had just then come out of prison into which he was sent two years back for publishing strictures on the character of Prince Regent, and thus had become the hero of the liberals. Keats had nothing to do with liberalism or any ism for that matter, but he started imitating Hunt's verse for which he conceived an uncritical admiration. Hunt went on encouraging the intellectual stimulus, with well-meant advice and with loud laudations. Keats's rapid development towards greater critical understanding and higher standards of artistic production is really wonderful. He soon recognised in Hunt's verse 'a pet lamb in a sentimental farce' and though his first volume

of verse published in 1817 is entirely under Hunt's influence, yet in *Endymion* published next year, he seems to have gone, inspite of immaturity, far beyond Hunt.

The extremely severe criticism in *Blackwood's Magazine* of his *Endymion* did give him great pain, more so because he was distracted on account of his brother Tom who was dying by inches. But he was not deflected from his purpose. He himself had felt the weakness of this poem and in a letter wrote about its "great inexperience, immaturity, and every error denoting a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished." He was growing rapidly "having outgrown *Endymion* almost before the ink was dry on its closing couplets." Though he had become a certified apothecary, he gave up his job and devoted all his time to the writing of poetry.

The year 1819 was the culminating point in his career. All the best of his work was done this year. *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes*, the great *Odes*, the first version of *Hyperion* were done this year and appeared in the volume of 1820. It was about this time that he fell in love with Fanny Browne. This love driven to hopeless extremity, his anxiety for money, and the attack of consumption darkened his life completely. His friends helped him to go to Italy and live there with tolerable comfort. But nothing availed. He went on writing or revising poems that were published later, and died in February 1821. His poetic life covers four brief years, two of immature apprenticeship and two of mastery to such a standard that his will be as he said, "I think I shall be among the English poets after my death." For most of

the time during his four years he was paying apprenticeship to great masters, Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Shakespeare, and proving not unworthy of the discipleship of these great ones. But in the midst of it he was able to produce a few masterpieces beyond price, " a lyric here and a ballad there, two or three sonnets, a narrative in forty-two Spenserian stanzas, and a noble epic fragment exhibiting a new and unexpected virtuosity." The rapidity with which he was maturing and the standard that he was attaining leads all to think of what he might have been and regret his too early death.

Keats is distinguished from other Romantic poets for he was ' a poet first and last.' His individuality consisted in rejection of all that was not poetical. His character is distinguished by his strict, faithful, whole-hearted devotion to Beauty and Beauty only. His letters long and short tell the sad story of his brief life, but they are relieved by so many beautiful critical utterances about his own works, and it is in them that we find the best commentary on his poems, on his devotion to beauty in the form of poetic art, the one passion of his life. His life was one of heroic struggle for a cause, the cause of the purest and the truest Romantic poetry. In one of his letters he says: "O for a life of sensations rather than of thought" and this statement interpreted too matter-of-factly has led to concieving him as a man of sensations who delighted in leading an epicurean mode of existence. His life of sensations did not mean confinement within the senses but taking part in the existence of every object that came before him, living as the saints and mystics did, but above all truest poets did, by thorough imaginative identi-

fication of himself with beauty in everything. He was fortunate in his friends, but he was lonely, homeless, denied of connections with his brother and sister, denied of love from Fanny because of his poverty. Still his heroic spirit kept on its steady course, its devotion to Beauty, its endeavour to attain perfection in art. He has not only left beautiful poetry, but the memory of a brief, but beautiful existence.

II

(*Narrative and Descriptive Poems*)

After the poems written under the influence of Leigh Hunt and published in the volume of 1817, it was by his *Endymion* that Keats made his mark. The story is taken from Michael Drayton and offers good points of comparison with Shelley's ***Alastor.*** In both the poet-hero starts on a quest for ideal beauty, but Shelley sees beauty in a dream and never reaches it, while Keats sees it in the concrete form of Diana, the goddess of moon, and realises it in art. But Shelley's poem is on a much higher standard of poetic art, while Keats gains real poetic expression of genuine power only in some passages. The opening is certainly immortal verse.

> A thing of beauty is a joy for ever
> Its loveliness increases ; it will never
> Pass into nothingness ; but still will keep
> A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
> Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing;
> Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing
> A flowery band to bind us to the earth,

Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and ever-darkened ways
Made for our searching: yes, in spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirits.

But this style could not be sustained and most of the poem gives us mere sensations. In portions of the long song or ode *To Sorrow* the style also rises from the sensual, to true sensuousness, as in the lines.

And as I sat, over the light blue hills
There came a noise of revellers : the rills
Into the wide stream came of purple hue—
'Twas Bacchus and his crew
The earnest trumpet spake, and silver thrills
From kissing cymbals made a merry din—
'Twas Bacchus and his kin !

But the poem must be read as the beginning of all the lines that Keats's poetry will follow. His cult of Beauty is stated at the very beginning. His appeal to the senses, his turn for the Hellenic myths and the concrete colourful life of the Hellenic people, his aptitude for elaborating cadenced odes, his power of narration and his critical powers—all are here. Keats appears here in all his panoply though he is yet a child finding his way towards great art.

The most glaring fault of his lies in the diffusion of interest over mere details. The same fault persists in

Lamia, but there is also evidence of greater concentration and greater density in this poem. The couplets used here are more moving, the epithets are truer and the style on the whole is of a firmer texture. The story of the snake-woman Lamia has been told with skill. She prayed to Hermes to change her into a beautiful woman. The prayer is granted and she winning the heart of Lycius, goes to her palace, where he is frightened by the sage Appollonius, the trusty guide and good instructor of Lycius. However her marriage with Lycius is arranged and a grand feast is a part of the celebrations, but Appollonius, according to her wish, is not invited. The banquet is going on when Appollonius appears and rebukes Lycius, revealing at the some time that Lamia was a snake. Lamia disappears and Lycius is left dead. The three characters of the story stand out boldly, specially the character of Appollonius, with distinct individuality and power. The poem gives good evidence of the fact that Keats had good powers of story telling and would have developed them if he had lived longer.

Isabella or The Pot of Basil, a story from Boccaccio shows a clear advance. It is a pathetic story of the love of Isabella, who lived with her two brothers enriched from ancestral merchandise, for Lorenzo their employee, dwelling in the same house with them. The lovers meet in secret, but the brothers discovering their love, took Lorenzo into a forest where they murdered and buried him. Isabella missed him very much and one night Lorenzo's ghost appeared to her and told her all about his murder and burial place. She reached the place, dug out the head of Lorenzo, and brought it home. She put it in a Basil pot

and shed tears over it all the time. The pot was also discovered by the brother who wanted to marry Isabella to some rich merchant. They contrived to steal the pot, and discovering in it the head of Lorenzo left Florence for ever. Isabella continued crying until she died. This pathetic story has been told in ottiva rima which Keats manages with greater skill than the couplets. The pathos kept within control by diversity, yet goes too far at places falling into sentimentality, Keats managing the events and characters with effect. But the poem represents a distinct stage in Keats's development.

However, the most beautiful, the most living of his longer poems is *Eve of St. Agnes*. Here a mediaeval legend has been put with all mediæval colouring in Keats's sensuous style at its best. The scene is a castle in which the Eve of St. Agnes is being celebrated. It is an extremely cold night and the poem begins with an impression of cold.

> St. Agnes' Eve—Ah, bitter chill it was !
> The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold ;
> The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,
> And silent was the flock in woolly fold :

The picture of the Beadsman with numb fingers, frosted breath, meagre, bare foot, van, and of the scupltur'd dead seeming to freeze, emprison'd in black, purgatorial rails, aching in icy hoods and mails, complete the sensation of cold. The three opening stanzas bring firstly the medieval atmosphere, the ritualistic religious element, the harsh penance suggesting the rigour of life in all aspects, and secondly the foretaste of the richly decorative art in which the whole story is to be clothed.

The scene shifts with the sounding of snarling trumpets and the level chambers, glowing to receive a thousand guests—

> The carved angels, ever eager-eyed,
> Star'd, where upon their heads the cornice rests,
> With hair blown back, and wingsput crosswise on their breast

and the argent revelry bursting in, are brought before our eyes. Our attention is fixed on one Lady sole thoughted who is fasting according to all rules of the tradition in order to have " visions of delight " about her future husband. The impression of sole-thoughtedness is further enhanced by telling us that

> her maiden eyes divine,
> Fix'd on the floor, saw many a sweeping train
> Pass by—she heeded not at all.

and further

> She danced along with vague regardless eyes,
> Anxious her lips, her breathing quick and short;
> The hallow'd hour was near at hand : she sighs
> Amid the timbrels, and throng'd resort
> Of whisperers in anger, or in sport ;
> 'Mid looks of love, defiance, hate, and scorn,
> Hood-wink'd with faery fancy ; all amort,
> Save to St. Agnes and her lambs unshorn,
> And all the bliss to be before to-morrow morn.

The portrait of the heroine of the story Madeline, full of her whim, lost in her love and her faith in the prophetic

influence of the ritual connected with the Eve of St. Agnes, is thus completed. It is not a character but a picture portrait worthy of a painter, showing the best of Keats's genius towards Spenserian picture-making.

The scene again shifts and Porphyro, her lover is introduced " with heart on fire for Madeline " coming across the moor. He is a typical mediæval lover, praying to all saints to give him sight of Madeline, coming stealthily into the castle of his beloved belonging to another clan at deep enmity with his own, and hoping to reach near her by the help of an old nurse. The story, it becomes clear, is like so many stories told about lovers in the middle ages all over the world. The conversation, between Angela, the old women and Porphyro and the stratagem proposed by Porphyro of being led into the room of Madeline, is also typical of the mediæval love stories. Porphyro with his lofty plume and burning heart remains a portrait, and so does the shuffling, palsied, nervous Angela, all the time crying " Well-a-well-a-day." She leads him to Madeline's room

Silent hush'd and chaste ;
Where Porphyro took covert, pleas'd amain.

This room is the last scene. Here Madeline comes like ring dove fray'd and fled. Her entry is described like a painting keeping due regard to fine touches of light and shade,

Out went the taper as she hurried in
Its little smoke, in pallid moonshine, died—

Madeline is akin to the the spirits of air, and visions wide—

But to her heart, her heart was voluble,
Paining with eloquence her balmy side,
As though a tongueless nightingale should swell
Her throat in vain and die, heart stifled, in her dell.

Keats enters deeper and deeper into the painter's art using colour effects when in the description of the decorations on the walls of the room he tells of

Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
As are the tiger-moth's deep damask'd wings;
And in the midst,' mong thousand heraldries,
And twilight saints, and dim emblazoninge,
A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and kings.

Such pictorial effects, lighted, coloured, are multiplied. The moon shines full on the casement

And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast.

and as she knelt for prayer

Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
And on her silver cross soft amethyst,
And on her hair a glory, like a saint,
She seem'd a splendid angel, newly drest,
Save wings, for heaven.

and as she fell asleep

Flown, like a thought, until the morrow day;
Blissfully haven'd both from joy and pain;
Clasp'd like a missal where swart Paynims pray;
Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,

As though a rose should shut, and he a bud again.

The activities of Porphyro are similarly pictured. The description of the dainties touches the taste and makes our mouth water—

> With jellies soother than the creamy curd,
> And lucent syrops, tint with cinnamon;
> Manna and dates, in argosy tranferr'd
> From Fez; and spiced dainties, everyone
> From silken Samarcand to cedar'd Lebanon.

Porphyro wakens Madeline who as it appears was dreaming of him, and her impression on waking of Porphyro, is beautifully painted.

> Ethereal, flushed, and like a throbbing star
> Seen mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose;
> Into her dream he melted, as the rose
> Blendth its odour with the violet—
> Solution sweet.

They decide to fly and the picture of their flight closing the poem is a fine example of motion picture. An elfin storm of haggard seeming, but a boon for them, the bloated wassaillers drowned in wine, the lovers hurrying, down the wide stairs a darkling way, through the house with no human sound, a chain-drooped lamp flickering by each door, the arras fluttering in winds, uprising and the carpets rising along the gusty floor—and as they move :

> They glide, like phantoms, into the wide hall;
> Like phantoms, to the iron porch, they glide;
> Where lay the Porter, in uneasy sprawl,

With a huge empty flagon by his side:
The wakeful blood hound rose, and shook his hide,
But his sagacious eye an inmate owns
By one, and one, the bolts full easy slide :—
The chains lie silent on the foot worn stones :—
The key turns, and the door upon its hinges groans.

A memorable collection of beautiful pictures ! The elements of the story, the events, the characters and the suspense are lost in pictures. Keats himself in one of his letters admitted the failure, pointing out the lack of 'events and characters' The fact is that his energy is distinctively directed towards picture-making in which his genius surely lies. The apt words, the richly suggestive epithets, the delicately coloured similes, the touching of the senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch bring to life eternally beautiful pictures. The Spenserian stanza with its eight lines building pictures by adding details and the ninth Alexandrine closing with a touch that illuminates the whole picture, is the fittest medium for Keats's purpose here. He proves himself a not unworthy, not inglorious son of Spenser. Of his longer poems, *Eve of St Agnes* represents at its best his sensuous, pictorial art.

Eve of St of Agnes attains the goal that Keats's genius was destined to reach. The fragment of the *Eve of St Mark* seems to be taking him to greater density in the art displayed here. His recasting of the epic *Hyperion* in the form of the *Vision of Hyperion* again shows his genius specially suitable for descriptions.

III

(Shorter Pieces)

The best of Keats's shorter pieces comprise about seven or eight sonnets and the superb *La Belle Dame sans Merci*. It will be wrong to call his gift lyric, taking the word in its strictest sense. Feelings came to him only for the purpose of being transformed into pictures. The motive force of his sonnets is some emotion, no doubt, but it is not emotion that is expressed in them, but a boldly outlined and coloured picture. He kept on writing sonnets from time to time. One of the earliest and still one of the best is that *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*.

> Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,
> And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
> Round many western islands have I been
> Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
> Oft of one wide expanse had I been told,
> That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne:
> Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
> Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
> Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
> When a new planet swims into his ken;
> Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
> He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
> Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
> Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

Here the structure is Wordsworthian or Petrarchan, but the style is Shakespearean, or Spenserian. The picture of

the realms of gold, and of the demesne, of deep-browed Homer, but specially the repetition of the same point by two similes in the sestet, is entirely in the richly loose manner of the Elizabethans.

Of the earlier sonnets three more, "Keen fitful gust are whispering here and there". "To one who has been long in city pent", "Happy in England! I could be content" reach high standard of poetic expression. They also show Keats's love of Nature and thus the influence of Wordsworth on him. But none reaches the standard of the *Chapman's Homer* sonnet which is, in art as well as accomplishment, a miraculous birth.

Of the sonnets written later at least five are very remarkable. The one entitled *The Sea*, "It keeps eternal whispering around", another, *The Human Seasons*, "Four seasons fill the measure of the year", and a third *To Sleep*, "O soft embalmer of the still midnight", are first rate and establish a lively individual note of Keats's own. But "When I have fears that I may cease to be" is very great for the power of expression so wonderfully displayed in the close :

> And when I feel, fair creature of an hour!
>   That I shall never look upon thee more,
> Never have relish in the faery power
>   Of unreflecting love! then on the shore
> Of the wide world I stand alone, and think,
> Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.

But none, not even the Chapman sonnet, can match in the pictorial expression of feeling and the powerful flow of

verses, his last sonnet ; the dying young man pining for the laps of his beloved here produces such a soul-animating strain as will live among the most remarkable of love poems :

Bright star ! would I were stedfast as thou art—
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like Nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priest like task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—
No—yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
Awake for ever in a sweet unnrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever—or else swoon to death.

The structure is English, Shakespearean, and the manner is now perfectly Keats's own. The heroic strength of the artist mixed with the tenderness of the sensuous lover here produces a rare strain that brings the whole of him face to face with us.

But none of his shorter poems can match his ballad poem *La Belle Dame sans Merci.* It is in the tradition of the lyrical ballad set by Wordsworth and Coleridge, specially Coleridge. The simple ballad measure with modification of the fourth line which is in bimeter and the air of artlessness given by simple, concrete diction and repetitions, tells a

universal story of hopeless love. The lover is a kinght-at-arms whose condition calls forth the questions :

O what can ail thee knight-at-arms.
    Alone and palely loitering ?
The sedge is wither'd from the lake,
    And no birds sing.
O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
    So haggard and so woe begone ?
The squirrel's granary is full
    And the harvest's done.

How simply, how artlessly, but how powerfully the picture of the knight loitering in natural surroundings is evoked. The ailing, palely loitering, haggard and woebegone knight is looked at closely and how beautifully is his woe reflected in his face :

I see a lily on thy brow
    With anguish moist and fever dew,
And on thy cheeks a fading rose,
    Fast withereth too.

and immediately after it, contrasted, but associated is the picture of the lady who has struck the knight :

I met a lady in the meads,
    Full beautiful—a faery's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
    And her eyes were wild.

The story of the knight's courtship of the lady and her ready sweet response is told in four remarbable stanzas.

And then comes the knight's dream of realitg, the reality that was a dream coming to an end, and the dream which is reality, a universal reality with a true vision of all disappointed lovers brought before us by the images as well as music, bringing forth the terror of disappointment :

> I saw pale kings and princes too,
> Pale warriors, death pale were they all ;
> They cried—' La Belle Dame sans Merci
> Hath thee in thrall.'
> I saw their straved lips in the gloam
> With horrid warning gaped wide,
> And I woke and found me here,
> On the cold hill's side.

The horrid warning that has been sounding through ages through all lands and the heart of all living men, is seen and heard. The knight is the symbol of an eternal lover, the lady, of the eternal flirt. By another push of the miraculous power Keats sounds another immortal note. In his own way he goes far beyond all the ballad writers of his age. In this ballad he sounds the truest lyrical note in keeping with his pictorial genius.

IV

(*Hyperion*)

Keats's most ambitious work is *Hyperion* written in avowed imitation of Milton's *Paradise Lost* which he follows too closely not only in matters of art and style, but also in method of telling the story. Milton's story of the Fall of

Man taken from the Bible led Keats to find a similar story in Greek mythology, the Fall of the Titans. Then he, leaving the invocation to the Muses, began with a quiet opening description of Saturn seated quite alone "deep in the shady sadness of a vale". Soon Thea enters and long epic speeches follow. The centre of interest is shifted from Saturn to Hyperion who is shown conversing with Coelus and there the first book ends. In the second book are recounted in details the names and characters of principal figures in the host of fallen Titans. After this there comes a grand debate in which great resolutions are taken and the second book is brought to an end. In the existing fragment of the third book Keats invokes the Muse and professes his inability to sustain the high theme which he has taken up. Apollo is shown talking to his daughter Mnemosyne. But then the poem is cut short.

Like Milton Keats wrote the poem with a moral purpose which is stated in the speech of Oceanus in the Second book:

> for'tis the eternal law
> That first in beauty should be first in might.

This moral has been presented through symbolism. The Titans, Coelus in the first book tells us, are

> Symbols divine,
> Manifestations of that beauteous life
> Diffus'd unseen throughout eternal space.

Hyperion and the Titans thus stand out as symbols of Beauty, and their success would have illustrated the moral of the poem. But since according to the Greek Myth they

were not to succeed in the end, the moral purpose of the poem appears to be stiffling itself. Keats was not a moralist by temperament and in posing as a moralist he fails. But in following the epic methods of characterisation and description he is quite successful. He exalts the outward of his characters by hyperbole. His descriptions are in grand style. He makes myths by combining features from various sources. His gods and goddesses can be identified with powers of Nature. The character of Hyperion, the sun god has the attributes one observes in the sun —" blazing", flaming robes"—

> The planet orb of fire, whereon he rode
> Each day from east to west, the heaven through
> Spun round in sable curtaining of clouds.

Here Keats takes up the work of making new myths out of Nature, a work which he will complete in the *Odes*

But in his letters, speaking about *Hyperion* he always talks of style and it was really Milton's grand style which had the focus of his attention and which in the end broke his back. He set about it with enthusiasm and showed his great cleverness. In the opening passage he attains still a tentative, half successful imitation of Milton.

> Deep in the shady sadness of a Vale,
> Far sunken from the healthy breath of Morn,
> Far from the fiery noon, and Eve's one star,
> Sat grey-hair'd Saturn quiet as a stone,
> Still as the silence round about his lair,
> Forest on forest hung above his head
> Like cloud on cloud. No stir of air was there ;

Not so much life as on a summer's day
Robs not at all the dandelions fleece.
But where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest.
A stream went voiceless by, still deadened more
By reason of his fallen divinity
Spreading a shade: the Naiad mid her reeds
Press'd her cold finger closer to her lips.

But as we go on reading the poem we find Miltonic graces coming more naturally and powerfully, as repetition in the lines.

How beautiful, if sorrow had not made
Sorrow more beautiful than beauty's self

or Miltonic simile :

As when upon a tranced summer night
Those green rob'd senators of mighty woods
Tall Oaks; branch-charmed by the earnest stars
Dream and so dream all night without a stir
Save from one sudden solitary gust
Which comes upon the silence and dies off
As if the ebbing air had lent one wave.

More of Milton's diction, vocabulary, idiom, use of proper names and adjectives, compound epithets, Latin inversions appears. Through two hundred lines, to the end of the first book the sustained power of movement, the swelling flood of harmonies, the inexhorable rhythms, and the majestic harmony of Milton's grand style are felt without slackening. The entry of Hyperion may provide one of the best examples of Keats's success :

He enter'd, but he enter'd full of wrath;
His flaming robes stream'd out beyond his heels,
And gave a roar, as if of earthly fire,
That scar'd away the meek ethereal Hours,
And made their dove-wings tremble. On he flared,
From stately nave to nave, from vault to vault,
Through bowers of fragments and enwreathed light,
And diamond paved lustrous long arcades
Until he reach'd the great main cupola;
There standing fierce beneath, he stampt his foot
And from the basements deep to the high towers
Jarr'd his own golden region; and before
The quivering thunder thereupon had ceas'd,
His voice kept out, despite of god-like curb,
To this result:

But we also perceive the power of this style gradually breaking. His imitation was on the artificial level, a *tour de force*. In the third book the allegiance to Milton is abandoned, and at last Keats wrote to Reynolds: "I have given up Hyperion—there are too many Miltonic inversions in it—Miltonic verse cannot be written but in an artful or rather artist's humour. I wish to give myself up to other sensations."

The poem remained unfinished, not because Keats died young, but because he had made a wrong choice. The method of telling the story, the moral purpose, the style were all alien to his inmost nature. He neither attained Milton's manner, nor working under his influence like Wordsworth, attained a manner of his own. But the

Miltonic schooling was not entirely in vain. The excessive rosiness and wordiness of the earlier poems is cured by submission to the condensed brevity of Milton's style. Greater mastery in the use of epithets has been acquired, greater hold on structure of poems and greater power over harmony between meaning and music, has been gained. Keats comes out of the Miltonic ordeal a greater poet, more fit to produce masterpieces.

V

(The Odes)

And Keats did attain masterpieces in the *Odes.* It is usual to class some of Keats's tetrameter poems with odes. Four such poems stand out and they may or may not be called odes; they are *Fancy, Lines on the Mermaid Tavern, Robin Hood,* and *Bards of Passion and of Mirth.* In all of them the measure and style of Milton's *L'Allegro* has been successfully imitated, so much so that a truly Keatsian note is clearly audible. *Robin Hood* and *Mermaid Tavern* are lighter. *Fancy* is brighter and sweeter as the beginning shows:

> Ever let the Fancy roam
> Pleasure never is at home :
> At a touch sweet pleasure melteth
> Like to bubbles when rain pelteth
> Then let winged fancy wander
> Through the thought till spread beyond her :

But the most powerful of them is *Bards of Passion.* The immortality of poets is the theme :

Bards of passion and of Mirth,
Ye have left your souls on earth!
Have you souls in heaven too
Double lived in regions new?

and then the poets in heaven are imagined to be communing with eternal values. But the function of their soul left on earth is more valuable,

And the souls you left behind you
Teach us, here, the way to find you,
Where your other souls are joying,
Never slumbered, never cloying.
Here, you earth-born souls still speak
To mortals of their little week;
Of their sorrow and delights :
Of their passions and their spites;
Of their glory and their shame;
What does strengthen, and what maim.
Thus ye teach us, every day;
Wisdom, though fled far away.

The case of the poet is admirable and is accompanied with a spontaneous flow of ideas and colours. The movement of verses is so free that one will read the whole poem non-stopped in one breath.

But the great *Odes* are five. Two of them *Ode to Psyche* and *Ode on Malancholy* are of inferior quality. But the three, *Ode to a Nightingale*, *Ode on a Grecian Urn* and *Ode to Autumn* are some of the greatest odes in English literature. These odes are lyrics no doubt, but in them the lyric inspira-

tion is coupled with a conscious effort to control, elaborate and build up emotions, images, and cadences into a harmony more artistic than natural. The stanza employed is elaborated tending to be stropic and produces by slow-built cadences an orchestral music. On analysis one finds that his stanzas are modifications of the sonnet-form which he had mastered before coming to write the odes. Anyway in these odes Keats's richly meditative genius finds its full scope.

In *Ode to Psyche* the mastery over stanza pattern is still incomplete. The poet conscious of this begins with avowing " tuneless numbers, wrung by sweet enforcement and remembrance dear". Then he goes on to picture a dream in which he saw Psyche and Cupid embracing their arms and wings but keeping their lips apart. After this comes the best stanza of the poem, a tribute to *Psyche*.

O latest-born and loved best vision far
    Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy !
Fairer than Poebe's sapphire-region'd star,
    Or Vesper, amorous glow-worm of the sky;
Fairer than these, though temple thou hast none,
    Nor altar heap'd with flowers;
Nor virgin-choir to make delicious moon
    Upon the midnight hours;
No voice, no lute, no pipe, no incense sweet
    From chain-swung censer burning:
No shrine, no grove, no oacle, no heat
    Of pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming.

Then the poem goes on rambling, further praising Psyche,

and then submitting to her as her priest. The epithets in this part are very apt, but the inspired note of the stanza quoted above is not reached. Keats himself wrote about this ode: "This I have done leisurely—I think it reads the more richly for it and will I hope encourage me to write other things in even a move peaceable and healthy spirit".

Ode to Melancholy is more concentrated and more carefully done. This ode has a thought the two opposite aspects of which are pictured in the first two stanzas and the clear statement of which is given in the third. In the first stanza we are asked not to go to Lethe or such like objects in order to seek partner in our sorrow's mysteries. In the second we are asked to glut our melancholy fit on a morning rose or on the peerless eyes of the beloved. The third stanza generalises the suggestions.

> She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die;
> And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
> Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,
> Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips:
> Ay, in the very temple of Delight
> Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine.
> Though seen of none save him when strenuous tongue
> Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine:
> His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
> And be among her cloudy trophies hung.

Like all the Romantics Keats also had a touch of melancholy in him, but this melancholy did not lead him to revolt like Shelley. It led him to submission to the beauties

of Nature and life, or rather he felt the sadness of her might in bursting Joy's grape against his palate fine and be among her cloudy trophies hung. The new ten-lined stanza with its pattern of rhymes created by a combination of the Spenserian stanza and the sonnet form, creates for the first time that slow-cadenced orchestral music which is one of the most outstanding characterstics of his great odes.

The greatest favourite among his odes, the one with which his name is most associated, is *Ode to a Nightingale.* It was composed on a bright day after the death of Keats's brother had wounded him deeply. It was inspired by the continued song of a nightingale which in the spring of 1819, had built its nest close to Wentworth Place where Keats was staying at that time with his friend Brown, as a next door neighbour to Fanny Browne with whom he was deeply in love. Such circumstances had induced in time the mood of melancholy with which the poem begins,

> My heart aches and a drowsy numbness
>
> Pains my sense,

but this melancholy is attributed to excess of happiness in the lot of the nightingale,

> Light-winged Dryad of the trees,
> In some melodious plot
> Of beechen green. and shadows numberless.
> Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

Melancholy in the heart of the poet is excessive and, as suggested in the *Ode on Melancholy*, seeks and finds relief by reaching the happiness of the Nightingale which is also excessive. Perhaps a draught of vintage

that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep delv'd earth
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirt!

or a beakerful of the warm South

Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth

may enable him to leave the world unseen

And with thee fade away into the forest dim.

But to finish the melancholy by dissolving it in the happiness of the Nightinagle is a hopeful striving, for the causes of the poet's melancholy are too real and the picture of them rises too glaringly before the poet's eyes—

The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies:
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs
Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new love pine at them beyond tomorrow.

This is Keats's picture of the worry of the world, his own worry, the death of his brother foreshadowing by a poetic prophecy his own death, the mood of thoughtfulness of the poet leading to despair, the love for Fanny Browne tending

to fade with decline in her beauty—a personal picture and yet a universal one, a picture of realities contrasted with the natural, Romantic happiness of which Nightingale is the symbol.

Relief comes to the poet through his own art "the viewless wings of Poesy," that at once take him from the region of deadening despair to perfect happiness and the joy is celebrated by beautiful expression of this happiness. The last six lines of the fourth stanza and the whole of the fifth picture the poet lost in the dark happiness which surrounds the nightingale. There is perfect enjoyment of the Queen moon on her throne, clustered around by all her starry Fays, the light blown with the breezes through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways, the flowers at his feet, the guessing of each sweet in embalmed darkness

White howthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast-fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

This is the height of sensuous enjoyment, the beauty appealing to the eye and the ear, the happiness of Nightingale which has been connected with pictures of sensuous, romantic beauty.

The excess of sensuous enjoyment leads to easeful death. This is not excess of despair. It is not escape. Not at all. It is the natural limit of happiness to be gained through the senses. It is ecstasy which is persistant in the

bird, but which the poet reached ' for many a time ' and is realising it at its best. Death here is not a escape. It is a step into immortality. The poet will grow spectre-thin and die, will become a sod to the high requiem of the bird. but his ecstasy, the high requiem of the bird,

> The self-same song that found a path
> Through the sad heart of Ruth, when sick for home,
> She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
> The same that oft times hath
> Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery land forlorn.

this has lived and shall live. The song ot the bird and the song of the poet reaching the happiness of the bird are one and both are immortal, for Romantic beauty that they create immortal. Meddling intellects, trying to analyse the meaning of Keats by thinking of Keats as an individual man who must die and so must the individual bird which he calls immortal, are led to read a contrast between the permanence of nature and transitoriness of human life in the penultimate stanza. A moment's thought will lead us to conclude that all such speculations only confuse the point. The poem brings before us the immortality of life finding its supreme expression in artistic creation, whether it be the song of the bird, or the song of the poet becoming a true accompaniment of the song of the bird.

Inspiration, the stress of the Muse of poetry, had brought Keats to this supreme realisation of immortality, the meaning of existence. But not sure of his achievement and with excess of faith in his own conscious effort he Sat down to add the last stanza. No doubt a feeling of the in-

completeness of the poem led him to do this and he was right in sitting down to complete it. But the way he did it was not the way of the Muse but of the painstaking poet in him. Here the immortal song of happiness is turned into a 'plaintive anthem', the supreme moment of artistic creation into 'fancy cheating so well' or a confusion,

> Was it a vision or a waking dream
> Fled is that music do I wake or sleep ?

Like all great artists, Keats too was not completely conscious of what was happening and how it was happening. But therein lies his immaturity that he failed to realise the greatness of what had happened. If instead of expressing his dis-satisfaction with his vision of a supreme moment, he would have asserted its significance as an intimation of immortality, not only had the confusion of meaning of the poem, the satisfaction of its best impressions had been saved, but the poem would have become the most moving as well as the most artistic of all the odes.

However, when we think of Keats we think of the *Ode to a Nightingale*. "Thy spirit's sister, the lorn nightingale" as Shelley puts it. The Romantic poets sang of birds and in some bird or other we came to realise their spirit's sister. With Wordsworth it is the cuckoo, with Coleridge, the Albatross, with Byron, the bird in *The Prisoner of Chillon*, with Shelley the Skylark, and with Keats, the Nightingale, the bird associated with romance, with love, with all that is beautiful in Nature, the spirit of beauty, as it were, of sensuous beauty of which one of the incarnations was Keats himself. The inevitable words, the infinitely suggestive epithets, onomatopoeic effects, the sensuous effects of the pictures of

moonlight, darkness, flowers, of Ruth sick for home, of magic casements put in delicately within forcefully cadenced lines forming a richly patterned ten—lined stanza with its seventh short line carrying the movement with natural turn, constitute one of the great achievements of English poetry.

Ode on Grecian Urn and *Ode to Autumn* are greater works. It is difficult to choose between the two. In both beauty reaches her supreme realisation, in the one through a picture of Hellenic life, in the other through a picture of Nature as seen in English countryside during the typically English season of Autumn.

For an appreciation of the beauty embodied in *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, it is needless to enquire whether it was one urn, or many, or any of the Elgin marbles that gave Keats the picture that he describes in his Urn. What matters is his kinship with the Hellenic spirit, its concreteness, its myth-making tendency, even its idolatory, for the turn towards presenting sculptured beauty is evinced in all poems from *Endymion* to *Hyperion*. Keats Urn is a creation of his imagination, an ideal urn embodying all that he valued in Hellenic life, in life itself as a series of pictures of Beauty hiding behind their glamour the eternal truth of creation. The Urn is a symbol of some sublime reality connected with peculiar aspects of Keats's experience. Keats was a sensualist, a lover of everything that came through the senses. But he came to realise there was some larger reality permanent, complete, eternal behind all the transient glamorous flashes. This realisation is carried on through the odes. It reaches a definite stage in *Ode to a Nightingale*,

but aberration remains checking completion. It reaches its goal in *Ode to Grecian Uru* and *Ode to Autumn.* Thus the central theme of all the odes is the same and it is only its presentation in different forms and at different stages of development that differentiates the one ode from the other.

Ode on Gracian Urn begins with a consciousness of deeper and mysterious meaning. The Urn is the unravished bride of quietness, foster child of silence and slow Time. Then the figures on the Urn are questioned. Are they deities or mortal? men or gods? The love, the music suggested, has it all merely physical or some deeper or eternal significance? The answer comes in the second stanza where the unheard melodies are realised to be sweeter and each are of the picture to be immortal.

> Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
> Are sweeter: therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
> Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
> Pipe to the spirit deities of no tone:
> Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou caust not leave
> Thy song, not ever can those trees he bare;
> Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
> Though winning never the goal—yet, do not grieve
> She cannot fade, though thou has not thy bliss,
> For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

This realisation of eternity behind the forms makes the poet fall into rapture which is expressed in the bouyant, joyful lines of the third stanza in which all the pictures presented in the second stanza are addressed with emphasis on their happiness, their deeper significance being put in a generalised form at the end of this stanza.

All breathing human passion for above,
That leaves a heart high sorrowful and cloyed
A burning forehead and a parching tongue

The fourth stanza presents a new picture. Upto this time the picture consisted of lover, singer, natural abjects, a specialised picture, a reflection of Keats's own experience of Nature, love, and poetry. But the new picture is broader covering the whole life in a city, the ritual of religious sacrifice, the celebration of a festival, and the city emptied of its folk:

Who are these coming to the sacrifice ?
To what qreen altar, mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest ?
What little town by river or sea shore
Or mountain built with peaceful cifadel
Is emptied of it follk, this pious morn ?
And, little town, thy streets for every more
Will silent be : and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

This picture too along with the former one teases us out of thought as doth eternity. The idea behind the first picture comes to be naturally applied to this second, to all human life, to practices of all human beings. Hence the conclusion follows and ends the poem:

Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

These last lines of the poem have met with censure from all quarters. They come rather awkwardly, too aberuqtly at

the end of the poem, the tone and the colouring of which either require no such general statement of the implied fact, or if the fact was to be stated, it must have been put in some other way. The feeling of a flaw here cannot be overcome or explained away. But as a summary statement of the idea behind the poem or the idea behind the entire poetic career of Keats, they are significant. The belief that truth and beauty are one comes out of the first line of *Endymion*, is repeated in so many letters, is present in some form or other in all poems struggling to realise itself, the central faith of all Keats's endeavour—his cult of Beauty. Its applicability to any artist while he is concerned with his art and while he is working with his art, is undisputed. But to apply it to all life leads us into that mysticism which lay behind the Hellenic creed towards a fuller realisation of which Keats was struggling.

The fact is that the cult of Beauty in art was to be impressed by what Keats called the "negative capability". Truth was to come out by itself through beautiful forms without the intrusion of the artist with positive assertions. This takes place in the *Ode to Autumn*, which is one clear, precise, perfect picture representing the zenith of Keats's sensuous art, the one perfect, flawless production towards which his genius was striving. Here the Nature cult of the Romantics is seen to be assimilating the Hellenic cult of the ancients with full consent of the goddess of beauty whose a much worshipper Keats always was. The genius of Keats entering the heart of mother Earth, English soil, brings all its hidden beauties into relief. It is the plenty of Autumn, its plenteous output of beauty, first in fruits and flowers

And fill all fruits with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the haze shells
With a sweet vernal; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm day will never cease,
For summer has over o'er brimmed their clammy cells.

next in the beautiful pictures activities of men which are the activities of Autumn himself as a personified. mythical being :

Sitting careless on grainery floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half reaped furrow sound asleep,
Drowsed with the fumes of poppies, while thy hook
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers;

and last in the music in evenings.

While bared clouds bloom the soft dying day
And touch the stubble plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river sallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;

A new myth, original, concrete like the Hellenic myt his created. The negative capability of the poet is perfectly realised; he is completely lost in the beauty of the pictures presented, in the slow sweet, orchestral music of the stanzas. The details are wonderfully well selected, the words and phrases reach the height of appropriateness and beauty. It is not possible to find the slightest flaw in this miraculous achievement. We are face to face with Beauty herself.

VI

It is said that if Keats had lived, he would have been the greatest poet of his generation. There is no doubt that his is the most poetical of all Romantic poetry. It is pure poetry, depending entirely on truth of imagmation, cutting itself entirely off from the various intellectional currents in which the poetry of most of contemporaries got involved. It is poetry from the beginning to the end. It begins at a low pitch of culture, full of sensationalism, profusion of colours, sensual indulgence. But a passionate love of beauty and an ardent endeavour to realise it in poetry is not to be missed. Knowledge comes to develope it in right direction. Intellectual elements enter it only to be transformed into poetry. The only philosophy and the only religion that gets into it is the adoration of the beautiful and the realisation of the doctrine: Beauty is Truth. The cult is seen to be pursued with a defiency of culture, a voluptuous irresponsibility; a lack of coherence very often mar the effect that if tries to produce.

At its best its hall mark is sensuousness. It touches all our senses, by the richness and softness of colouring. Nature is presented as feast for the senses. The wisdom of the Hellenic people, coming to help Nature becomes coloured by the presence of Greek gods and goddesses, their by original myths. The Middle Ages with their colourful life, their rituals, their simplicity come to form a part of sensuous expression. Emotions come to control sensations, bringing out the pain of joy and joy of pain. A deep pessimisim, a melancholy springing from too much preoccupation with sensations

seems to colour it, and lead it to morbidity. But it goes on growing in health gaining greater clearness, greater precision. The sensuous particularity reaches the height of poetic pictorial art. The process of purification gradual but miraculously rapid is one of the most interesting features of this poetry. To the end signs of immaturity remain, but at its best the highest poetic standard is certainly reached.

At its best it gives us the favourite highest themes of Romanticisn treated in the Romantic way. But it has its orignality and its individuality. It presents the spiritual the pictorial beauty of charming Greek myths or new Nature myths, the joy in the beautiful aspects of Nature, the yearning of a soul for Beauty that is eternal. Sensual and dreamy contemplation covers the forms, the colours, and the emotion in it. A smooth suavity marks its melody. There is an endeavour to load every rift with ore and at last a beautiful concentration is attained. The words become loaded with inexhastuble meaning, the epithets with extraordinary richness of suggestion. Images become evocative and bring before the eyes far-reaching perspective. The language is ordinary but is managed with conciseness and exactness. The music working with enthalling melody and smoothness become part and parcel of the unity of impression. This poetry has peculiar fascination for young persons. But the grown up people also cannot but enjoy its perfect loveliness.

The bulk of the most worth while part of it comes to some hundred lines. But it is at the level of the highest. It has had great influence. Tennyson was

deeply influenced by it and continued it in his own way. Two schools, the pre-Raphaelites and the Aesthetes took it up and spread it as an artistic cult. In an age when poetry was getting marred with various intellectual preoccupations, it bears the torch of pure poetry, true poetry, the art of producing beauty through the resources of language.

Criticism on Poetry